DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 427 048 TM 029 429

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TITLE The Assessment Clearinghouse.
PUB DATE 1998-12-00
NOTE 6p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Assessment; Elementary Secondary Education; Models; *Performance Based Assessment; *Test Construction; Test Use
IDENTIFIERS *Memphis City Schools TN

ABSTRACT

The Assessment Clearinghouse of the Memphis (Tennessee) City Public Schools is a collection of performance-based instructional tasks that have been designed to address specific content standards at specific grade levels. The tasks consist of a complete set of instructional and assessment activities for immediate classroom use. They also provide a model that may be replicated by teachers who wish to develop their own ideas. All of the Clearinghouse tasks contain an introductory activity, a series of hands-on group activities, and an individual application that gives the student the opportunity to demonstrate what has been learned. Most of the individual applications require integration of one or more subject areas beyond the primary focus. The "Catalog of Performance-Based Instructional Tasks" contains descriptions of 174 tasks in the areas of English/language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, arts, foreign language, and health. An example of an individual application for grades 6 through 8 is given, with the scoring rubric for the task. (SLD)

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The Assessment Clearinghouse

Lydia Abell

ED 427 048

Fourteen-year-old Jim was in trouble. Luckily his trouble didn't have anything to do with crime, gangs or drugs. It had to do with success. His brand-new business was booming gloriously. It seemed like everyone wanted to hire *Jim's Grass Cutting Service* to keep their summer lawns looking good. All Jim's friends were eager to make some money cutting grass. The money was rolling in, which was good for business, but bad for Jim. At the end of his first two weeks, Jim was facing a large cache of money, unhappy "employees" who hadn't been paid, some assorted time sheets, empty gas cans and one damaged mower. In desperation Jim asked for help: "Can someone figure out how much I owe all my employees? Can someone make me a business plan for the rest of the summer season before I lose both my employees and my customers?"

Real World Problems

Jim's problem with rapid expansion and no plan is commonplace in the business world. In this case, Jim's problem is the Individual Application section in a performance-based instructional task entitled *Cutting the Grass,* which may be found in the Memphis City Schools (MCS) Performance Assessment Clearinghouse. The Clearinghouse was created to provide curriculum support to teachers engaged in standards-based instruction and assessment. Content standards in all subjects at all grade levels were developed during the 1995-96 school year and were introduced to teachers and principals during the 1996-97 school year. Professional development continued in 1997-98 to help lead teachers develop instructional strategies for a standards-based curriculum.

The Assessment Clearinghouse is a collection of performance-based instructional tasks that have been designed to address specific content standards at specific grade levels. These tasks consist of a complete set of instructional and assessment activities for immediate classroom use. They also provide a model that may be replicated by teachers who wish to develop their own ideas. The *Catalog of Performance-Based Instructional Tasks* was published in August 1998, containing descriptions of 174 tasks written by a group of teachers-on-assignment to the Office of Student Standards.

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Clearinghouse Tasks

All Clearinghouse tasks have three parts. The first is an introductory activity, which serves to orient students to the content of the task. The second part is a series of hands-on group activities. The purpose of the group activities is direct instruction and skills practice. The final part of a Clearinghouse task is the Individual Application, which is the student's opportunity to demonstrate what has been learned during instruction. The Individual Application requires the creation of some product, project or performance. Each task includes a scoring rubric for the Individual Application.

The format of Clearinghouse tasks evolved from three specific questions the task developers asked themselves:

1. What is your chosen standard and grade level?

This is always the first question to consider in task design. *Cutting the Grass* is a task written at the 8th grade level to address MCS Mathematics content standard #3: Students should be able to use mathematical reasoning to analyze and answer theoretical and real-world questions and problems.

2. What do you want to teach with this task?

This is the opportunity to be specific about what you are teaching. Each task contains a listing of items labeled *Performance Criteria,* which state the content, skills and abilities addressed by the task. These criteria are used to guide the development of the rubric, as well as the group activities that are included. The Performance Criteria for *Cutting the Grass* include accurate computation, descriptive graphs and charts, appropriate and standard language in a written report, an effective oral presentation and a complete proposal to meet all company needs.

3. What can you ask the students to make or do to demonstrate that they can meet the Performance Criteria?

The answer to this question is the basis for the Individual Application, or final project of the task. Once the nature of this culminating project is determined, it will drive all the preceding group activities. The group activities include instruction and practice in all skills required by the Individual Application.

The Individual Application in *Cutting the Grass* is a written report and an oral presentation that answers specific questions for Jim, such as how much money each worker should receive according to the submitted time sheet, what percentage and amount of the earned income should be allocated to maintenance and how much Jim should receive as a management fee.

The group activities in *Cutting the Grass* offer instruction and practice in data interpretation, graph construction, business planning, report writing skills and conventions of effective oral presentation. The number of activities the teacher chooses to include depends on the readiness of each group of students for the particular task. For example, students who have limited experience with a particular skill may need additional activities added to the task. Teachers are encouraged to add or delete activities according to their classroom needs.

Integrated Disciplines

The Individual Application seeks to be a challenging task that nearly always requires the integration of one or more subject areas beyond the primary focus. For example, *Cutting the Grass* is a mathematics task with a strong language arts component in the written report and oral presentation required by the Individual Application. The supporting content standard is listed on the front page of the task, along with the Performance Criteria and other summary information. The Individual Application and Rubric for *Cutting the Grass* may be found at the end of this article.

Clearinghouse Use

The *Catalog of Performance-Based Instructional Tasks* was delivered to schools during the first week of classes in August, 1998. The catalog contained descriptions of 174 tasks in the areas of English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Arts, Foreign Language and Health, Physical Education and Wellness. Teachers submitting task orders received copies of the complete tasks on diskettes. Clearinghouse staff distributed 5,776 copies of tasks as requested by teachers and schools between September 17, 1998 and December 7, 1998.

Clearinghouse staff supervised the piloting of 20 tasks during the fall semester. The participating teachers provided samples of student work and valuable feedback to help staff improve the tasks with additions and corrections where needed.

III Individual Application

Your friend Jim has hired you to straighten out his financial records for his highly successful business, *Jim's Grass Cutting Service*. The business got so busy so quickly that Jim's books became confused. That's why he hired you.

Here are the guidelines about the business:

1. Each yard is worth a set amount of money. This was negotiated by Jim and has nothing to do with how many people mow the yard.
2. Jim feels like he should get some money from each job, as a management fee for the trouble he went to in setting up the business.
3. Jim also feels like the company needs a maintenance fund to pay for gasoline and equipment repairs.
4. Jim's friends help with the business, and Jim wants everyone paid fairly.
5. Jim has agreed to pay you $20.00 for your report.

Here is the information Jim has given you:

JOB	DATE	$ VALUE	WORKERS	1/2 day	1 day
1. Mr. Smith	6/20	$30	Tom		X
			Joe	X	
2. Mrs. Johnson	6/22	$45	Jim		X
			Rico		X
3. Mr. Hamilton	6/23	$65	Joe	X	
			Carl		X
			Rico	X	
4. Mr. Bailey	6/25	$100	Tom		X
			Jim		X
			Larry	X	
			Steve	X	
5. Mrs. James	6/26	$50	Carl	X	
			Larry	X	
6. Mrs. Mason	6/26	$30	Jim		X
7. Mr. King	6/28	$125	Carl	X	
			Larry		X
			Tom	X	
			Joe	X	

Your job is to write a report for Jim that proposes how the money should be distributed. The seven jobs above represent the total amount Jim has received. Be sure to show your work whenever possible. Include any graphs and charts you think would help clarify your proposal. Make sure your calculations are correct and your report is free of grammatical and mechanical errors. In addition to your written report, prepare your proposal as an oral presentation.

Rubric for Cutting the Grass
Grades 6 - 8

Student's Name_____

4 Points

- Proposal is comprehensive and meets all company requirements.
- All computation is accurate and clear.
- Graphs and charts ane correct and descriptive.
- Report is well-organized, uses appropriate language, and is error-free.
- Oral presentation is organized, clear and effective.

Comments:

_____

3 Points

- Proposal is fairly comprehensive and meets most company requirements.
- Most computation is accurate and clear.
- Graphs and charts are mostly correct and descriptive.
- Report is mostly well-organized, usually uses appropriate language, and is mostly error-free.
- Oral presentation is fairly well-organized; most of it is clear and effective.

Comments:

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2 Points

- Proposal may or may not be comprehensive and meets some company requirements.
- Some computation is accurate and clear.
- Graphs and charts may or may not be correct and descriptive.
- Report is somewhat organized, sometimes uses appropriate language, and contains some errors.
- Oral presentation shows some organization; it is occasionally clear and minimally effective.

Comments:

_____

1 Point

- Proposal is not comprehensive and doesn't meet company requirements.
- Some computation is not accurate and clear.
- Graphs and charts are not correct, or there are none.
- Report is not organized, uses inappropriate language, and contains many errors.
- Oral presentation is unorganized, unclear and ineffective.

Comments:

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0 Points

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